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DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA, INCLUDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS NEW AGENDA FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA IN THE 1990s

Statement submitted by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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1. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), representing 127 million workers in 135 countries, and its African Regional Organization (ICFTU/AFRO), representing 5½ million African workers in 37 countries, appreciate this opportunity to present its views to the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The policies which are detailed below have been drawn up by a series of ICFTU/AFRO conferences on the economic and social priorities for Africa and endorsed by the ICFTU, including, most recently, the Pan-African Trade Union Summit on "An Agenda for African Development into the 21st Century" (Tunis, 3 and 4 June 1994) and the Pan-African Trade Union Summit on "The Challenge of African Economic Development and Regional Integration in the Face of Globalization", (Tunis, 5-7 May 1995). These policies have been discussed with the Secretary-General and the President of the Organization for African Unity (OAU) and with the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The signing of a joint memorandum of

understanding covering cooperation between ECA and ICFTU/AFRO in Addis Ababa on 11 September 1994 bears witness to the common understanding which exists on the causes of Africa's economic crisis and on the necessary solutions.

2. ICFTU does not minimize the scale of the problems. Poverty is worsening over much of the continent, with women in most cases the main sufferers. Urban unemployment, illiteracy, malnourishment, famine and epidemics such as AIDS have reached disastrous proportions. This economic and social crisis has not been met by an adequate response from the Governments of Africa or the industrialized countries. The total debt burden is continuing to rise and the structural adjustment programmes of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have led to worsening inequity and poverty and have mostly failed to promote economic growth.

3. The situation calls for urgent measures by African countries which should be backed up by the whole international community. The World Summit for Social Development, held in Denmark in March 1995, provided the occasion for a renewed pledge to achieve lasting development in Africa, shown by the provision of a special commitment for the economic, social and human resource development of Africa (commitment 7). 1/ The discussion on the development of Africa at the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council provides a chance to decide on the necessary measures to translate this global consensus into a real improvement in Africa's economic prospects.

4. First and foremost, sustainable development in Africa will require open, democratic, accountable institutions where human rights are fully respected. Consequently it is vital that the democratization process in Africa be reinvigorated and given real meaning at all levels for women and for men.

5. Respect for trade union rights is central to this process. Strong, free trade union organizations which promote an equitable distribution of income and wealth are a precondition for development. The role of trade unions was recognized in the Declaration for the World Summit for Social Development (commitment 3 (i)). 1/

6. Tripartite involvement in the drawing up of national recovery and development programmes is a prerequisite for their success. Development can only succeed on the basis of consensus, equity and a strong social dimension, as stated in the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation adopted at Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania in 1990 and by the World Summit for Social Development. The Summit stated that effective implementation of social development would require "enabling and encouraging trade unions to participate in the planning and implementation of social development programmes" (Programme of Action, para. 86 (c)). 2/ Consequently, African Governments should initiate tripartite consultations at national level on the future direction of the economy.

7. The World Summit for Social Development included the commitment "that when structural adjustment programmes are agreed to they include social development goals, in particular eradicating poverty, promoting full and productive employment, and enhancing social integration" (commitment (8). 1/ Governments must point out to IMF and the World Bank that basic needs must be taken into account in all structural adjustment programmes and must involve

unions in all negotiations concerning social matters. The ministries of labour, health, education and other vital social areas should be associated with all structural adjustment discussions. Governments need to make this clear both in their own negotiations and by working together through ECA and OAU, which will give them a position of greater force in their contacts with IMF and the World Bank.

8. In areas such as education, health, alleviation of poverty, and infrastructure provision, only the State will undertake these needed investments. Before going ahead with privatization, which is under way in the vast majority of African countries, there should be an open examination of the options for retaining the enterprise in the public sector. Privatization should be undertaken only if the result were positive in social terms. Some sectors should not be privatized, including health, education and energy distribution. Where privatization is advisable, workers in the enterprises to be privatized should be able to participate in share ownership, often through the setting up of trust funds.

9. Economic development programmes need to have a framework of stability which can allow economies to adjust successfully through increasing production and employment, rather than through economic contraction to cut imports. There must be a fair sharing of the costs of adjustment and the highest contribution must be made by those with the greatest ability to pay.

10. While the rural sector must receive more attention, industrialization has to remain a priority if Africa is to accelerate development and move towards the same level as other continents in the twenty-first century. Particular attention must therefore be given to providing the fabric of industrial know-how which can enable industrialization to take place - skills, continual training, infrastructure and facilities. At the same time, the denial of labour rights in export processing zones (EPZs) does not constitute a viable path for industrialization. All national labour legislation must be fully applicable throughout any country, including IPZs.

11. Some authoritarian Governments are striving to reduce their export costs by restricting the rights of workers and their trade unions. This short-sighted approach only stores up social inequities, resulting in instability, tension and lower economic growth in the long run. Its immediate consequence is that other countries find themselves unable to compete in the same markets for those exports. The World Summit for Social Development made the commitment to safeguard "International Labour Organization Conventions, including those on the prohibition of forced and child labour, the freedom of association, the right to organize and bargain collectively and the principle of non-discrimination" (commitment 3 (i)). 1/ To guarantee the respect of these rights a worldwide social clause needs to be incorporated into international agreements, including those related to the World Trade Organization (WTO).

12. Training and education for adults, young people and children provides one of the keys to economic development. The need for more spending on education in Africa must be recognized and addressed. Training and retraining require particular attention for women workers, whose vocational qualifications are generally less than those of men.

13. A reduction in the rate of population growth would bring benefits in terms of a lesser strain on health and education facilities and family incomes and in the long term would reduce the rate of growth of the labour force. Success in population policy depends more than anything else on the role of women. Therefore measures to provide and promote adequate facilities and education in family planning, backed up by more education for girls and women and a higher participation rate in the economy, should form part of development programmes. The international community should honour the commitments to increase spending on population programmes which were made by both aid donor and recipient countries at the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo from 5 to 13 September 1994.

14. Regional economic integration will provide a vital basis for development. Governments must take up the political challenge of ensuring that the deadlines for implementing regional integration agreements are met and provide the resources for regional institutions to function effectively. There is great scope for increasing intraregional trade and escaping the problem of small markets. In every part of Africa there exist regional trade union organizations and these should have a formal right to participate in joint working committees on social matters and to present their views to summits of regional leaders.

15. One half of Africa's population, the women, are at present virtually confined to low-status tasks and low-paid occupations, often accompanied by bad working conditions. Economic development in Africa requires recognition of women's value and improvement in women's working and living conditions. Women can escape from their low status, low wage or even unremunerated occupations by first of all having the economic value of their work recognized and properly remunerated. Governments must implement specific equality policies accompanied by positive action programmes.

16. Governments must recognize their interest in stemming the massive drift from the organized economy into the informal sector because it is creating a vast pool of low-income workers with little commitment to the existing social system. Accordingly, Governments need to formalize the informal sector by mobilizing its productive capacities at the same time as starting to extend protection to workers in the sector. These measures should be complemented by arrangements for educational and vocational training programmes. Women are in particular need of such assistance in view of their predominance in the informal sector. A particular effort is needed to remedy the problem of child labour.

17. Development programmes must guarantee food security through adequate production. The key is provided by building of institutions, foremost among which are rural workers' organizations whether trade unions, cooperatives or others. Since in many cases, the majority of rural workers are women, an important element must be support services specifically for women, aimed at improving the productivity of women's work in agriculture and their incomes. Furthermore, trade unions are ready to work together with African Governments to integrate protection of the environment into economic development strategies.

18. African migrant workers require proper protection whether working in other African countries or outside the continent. The host countries should therefore enforce legislation on equal wages and conditions and devote serious attention to the fight against xenophobia. In the countries of origin, jobs should be provided for those sections of the population most likely to emigrate in order to dissuade desperate forms of migration. Governments should ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

19. African countries need a breathing space in payment of their external debt. Debt write-off should be extended on the most generous possible terms to democratic African countries which respect human rights, including trade union rights. The international community should provide increased aid as a supplement to individual countries' own efforts, as it committed itself to doing at the World Summit for Social Development. Such aid should be targeted to meeting the needs of the poorest groups and above all to education programmes. Conversely, international development assistance should be withheld from countries that violate trade union and other human rights.

20. The potential exists for Africa to make a decisive break with the legacy of the past and achieve the beginnings of sustainable economic development which can bring real benefits to the women and men of Africa. ICFTU and its African affiliates will make all efforts to meet the African development challenge until Africa succeeds in achieving real economic and social development with democracy and equity.

Notes

1/ Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995 (A/CONF.166/9), chap. I, resolution 1, annex I, sect. C.

2/ Ibid., resolution 1, annex II.